Use of Technology
to Enhance Licensing Administration

Health and safety is the foundation of quality in child care. State licensing systems provide a vehicle to ensure that child care programs understand and meet minimum requirements for the health, safety and well-being of children in out-of-home care. The Office of Child Care through the work of its National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement, NCCCQ, is committed to assisting States/Territories strengthen the effectiveness of their licensing systems.[1]

As in most areas of program administration, technology and data are increasingly used to address demands for accountability, efficiency, and transparency within complex programs. While limited resources have kept many State/Territory child care licensing programs from taking full advantage of technology solutions, many others are moving forward in developing or purchasing data systems. In the 2012–13 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) plans, 11States and Territories identified goals that included enhanced use of technology and Web-based resources within their licensing programs.

Early childhood data systems were a priority of the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. This focus will result in significant progress in data collection and system linkages in States that were funded but also for those that described a new vision. States are becoming more focused on school readiness and child outcomes, and the quality of out-of-home care that children receive contributes to these readiness indicators.Therefore, data on the licensed status and compliance records of early learning and development programs will become more critical as cross-sector data systems evolve.

Recommended Best Practices for Human Care Regulation (National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA), 2009) recognizes the role that automation can play in knowledge management systems

> designed for efficient and effective support for the agency's information needs, e.g., avoid orminimize redundant data entry, provide Web-based support for public and for internal customers, readily allow recurring and ad hoc reports requiring integration ofinformation across the systems, generate and distribute routine tracking andmonitoring reports, etc. (p. 9)

States should continue to expand the use of technology to enhance their licensing programs and create efficiencies that will lead to increased protection and improved quality of care for children.This issue brief will provide an overview of nine ways state child care licensing programs are increasing their use of technology to include:

- Mobile technology for monitoring visits
- Use of data for caseload management and supervisory oversight

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[1] As a resource to State agencies, specific products, vendors and systems are referencedthroughout this document. However, the Office of Child Care and the National Center on Child Care Quality Improvement do not endorse any non-Federal organization, publication, or resource.

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- Automation to support risk management and consistency in enforcement actions
- Use of licensing and compliance data
- Linkages with other systems
- Online licensing information for consumers
- Online resources and alerts for providers
- Requests for public feedback
- Licensing staff development

Mobile Technology for Monitoring Visits

State licensing agencies are moving toward equipping their licensing staff with portable, hand-held devices such as notebooks or tablets with software that can both capture the licensing inspection information and provide data and resources to support staff in the field. Preliminary results from the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA)*2011NARA Child Care Licensing Programs and Policies Survey*found that 33States were using portable devices for licensing inspections. Some of the benefits that have been reported by States include:

- Monitoring data are recorded once during the inspection visit and do not have to be reentered upon return to the office.
- Prepopulation of forms with program information can reduce the time spent on paperwork and allow more time for observing care.
- Software that performs spell check, provides an alert when something has been overlooked, and allows for the selection of standardized text from licensing requirementsmakes reports more accurate, complete, and consistent.
- Licensors can access relevant monitoring information, e.g., prior facility history, requirements, the licensing statute, and resource materials, while in the field.
- Supervisors and managers have ongoing access to individual case records.If there is statewide wireless connectivity, monitoring reports can be immediately shared with a supervisor and feedback provided.
- Licensors can produce an inspection report while onsite and deliver the report to the provider by hand.
- Providers who are required to post the monitoring report in the facility feel that a typed copy is more professional and readable for parents.
- Reports can be emailed to other stakeholders, e.g., program board members.
- The full inspection report can be posted on the licensing Website for consumers.

Some States work with their agency's information technology staff to develop the software and database, while others work with private vendors.[2]

Some factors to consider when looking at various mobile devices for purchase include the weight of the device, the visibility of the screen, durability, electronic signature capacity, printer options, battery capacity, frequency of

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[2] Kansas and Texas developed their data systems internally. Florida, Georgia, Montana, New Mexico, and Ohio contracted with SansWrite to develop their systems, while Indiana, Maryland, Oklahoma, the Virgin Islands, and Washington contracted with TCC Software Solutions.

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hardware and software upgrades, and connectivity options, e.g., access in rural areas. If wireless connectivity is available, some vendors will provide an "evaluation unit" that States can try before purchasing.

Several States have noted the importance of staff training and support in the use of tablets, especially for staff with less experience with technology. One challenge of using technology is making sure that it does not create a barrier to communication or interfere with building relationships with providers.

State Examples

The **Florida** Department of Children and Families Child Care Services utilizes Panasonic Toughbook mobile computers combined with portable printers to conduct licensing inspections. The software and full database download allow counselors to view past inspections and violation history. Prior to leaving the site, the counselor is able to produce a signed and completed inspection report for the provider. This client software contains the necessary business logic to conduct licensing inspections, including all background and screening requirements, in accordance with State statute, the Florida Administrative Code, and State guidelines. Once completed, these inspections are archived to the Child Care Licensing Application database and can be viewed in real time through the licensing Web portal.

The **Indiana** Family and Social Services Administration maintains a contract with TCC Software Solutions to provide technical support to staff using Wireless Webforms software. Licensors are provided with a tablet computer with USB camera, rugged field case, docking station, BlueTooth-enabled portable printer, and a wireless card to transmit data. After the initial licensing data are entered, all forms are automatically populated with that information, ensuring that required forms and data elements are complete.A Plan of Correction form is populated withany noncompliance information and requires a response, including the name of the person responsible and the date by which the noncompliance must be corrected.The following benefitswere reported by Indiana's Bureau of Child Care after implementation of the Wireless Webforms application.

Cost Reductions

- Reduction in labor costs for consultants, saving 26 percent (or $316,605 annualized)
- Reduction in clerical effort by 82 percent (or $30,360 annualized)
- Potential savings by reducing the risk of making subsidy payments to providers with negative enforcement actions
- Savings in travel expenses by eliminating trips into the office to submit and pickup forms
- Elimination of costs associated with preprinting of paper inspection forms

Increase in Productivity

- Reduction in licensing application processing time from a 35-day average to less than 2 days
- Increase in the number of inspections that can be completed from 6,849 to 9,288 (annualized)
- Increase in accurate reporting and data-driven management decisions with more timely data
- Implementation of standardized workflow processes

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Increase in Quality

- Reduction of typographical errors as clerical staff no longer interpret handwritten inspections
- Assurance that data are complete and comply with business rules because of required data fields

Use of Data for Caseload Management and Supervisory Oversight

The *Child Care Administrator's Improper Payments Information Technology Guide,Part I* (Walter R. McDonald & Associates for the Office of Child Care, 2011) report notes that 37 States use automation to manage provider applications and licenses and track all aspects of the licensing process. It is anticipated that more States will begin to offer providers the opportunity to apply online for a license. Like the licensing monitoring report software, online applications can include edits that ensure that an application is complete before it's submitted and thus reduce the time required for manual data entry.

A licensing database can be programmed to automatically generate license provider notices for renewal, deficiencies, noncompliance, and other followup contacts. Data systems can also assist licensors with managing their caseloads throughautomated notices of routine and followup inspections that are due.An administrative report can provide a detailed summary of each licensor's workload, including the number of completed and upcoming inspections.This provides a quality assurance feature that ensures that inspections and followup visits are made in a timely manner and that workloads are equitable and manageable. If staff performance evaluations are based on measurable tasks—e.g., that 90 percent of monitoring visits be made within an established timeframe—a database can greatly simplify this labor-intensive supervisory responsibility.

As licensing programs face increasing demands with limited resources, States are seeking ways to target their efforts on the programs that need more intensive monitoring or support. In *Strong Licensing: The Foundation for a Quality Early Care and Education System* (NARA & Lapp-Payne, 2011), differential monitoring is defined as

> a monitoring technique whereby the frequency of inspections a licensed facility receives varies according to the facility's compliance history with program requirements. Facilities that exhibit a low level of compliance are inspected more frequently. (p. 22)

Preliminary results from the *NARA 2011 Child Care Licensing Programs and Policies Survey*show that26 States reported using differential monitoring for child care centers. States may also begin to use levels in a tiered quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) as another indicator of how frequently to conduct monitoring visits, with staff being able to override the projected inspection date when appropriate.

State Examples

The **Florida** Department of Children and Families Child Care Services relies on the Child Care Licensing Application, a Web- and client-based information system, to manage the department's child care licensing program. It provides an online application process for registered family day care and religious exempt providers. The portal is a comprehensive Web-based resource for child care licensing staff and contractors to use in conducting and managing licensing inspections, managing administrative action, reviewing and approving inspections for public viewing, and reporting on all data captured within the application.Supervisors have the ability to review and approve inspections and access a variety of different management and staff performance reports.

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The **Louisiana** Department of Social Services is able to track the following program performance measures: (1) licensing complaints received during thereporting period and the percentage that were completed within 30 days of the receipt of thecomplaint; (2) the percentage reduction of substantiated abuse/neglect allegations that occurred in out-of-home care settings; (3) the percentage of child care facilities inspected in a timely manner; and (4) the percentage of child care facilities incompliance.

The **New York** Office of Children and Family Services' automated statewide database, the Child Care Facility System, reports on a multitude of statistical data, such as number of applications in process; number and variety of violations; status of violations; number of overdue inspections; safety assessments in process, completed, or overdue; and the enforcement status of programs. The Office of Children and Family Services uses this information as a management tool, and to identify training and professional development topics for both providers and regulatory staff.Through a series of monthly management reports, regional and home office managers can evaluate caseloads and track performance measures such as the timeliness of initial licensing, renewals, complaint investigations, safety assessments, and completed inspections. The reports also help to identifytrends,adherence to regulatory requirements, and reasons for inspections. These reports are used as tools for regional managers to assess their office workloads, identify problem areas, and institute changes to better serve children in child care settings.The Office of Children and Family Services-contracted registration offices are also assessed using these standards and can be fiscally penalized for not meeting contractually agreed-upon standards.

Automation to Support Risk Management and Consistency in Enforcement Actions

States are seeking approaches to focus their efforts on programs that need increased monitoring. Many States are identifying and prioritizing health and safety violations that pose a greater risk to children. They may do this by identifying serious or critical standards, and a few are assigning a weight or category to each standard to further refine risk management and enforcement. Identifying the most critical requirements can help providers, parents, and licensing staff better understand the potential consequences of noncompliance. Weighted standards can also support a more sophisticated data system, for example, one that can report on recommended monitoring and enforcement actions. As noted in the Texas example below, there are limitations to the use of weighted standards—e.g., they cannot capture the scope and severity of a violation.

Strong Licensing: The Foundation for a Quality Early Care and Education System (NARA & Lapp-Payne, 2011)suggests the use of data to

> examine associations between and among specific program requirements, violations, compliance histories, and relative risk for licensed facilities, then tailor the scope or frequency of inspections or greater attention to those requirements and facilities. It requires extensive analysis of facility characteristics/profiles to develop a suitable method. (p. 37)

An automated licensing data system can improve consistency and timeliness in determining how frequently monitoring should occur and also in recommending enforcement actions. While licensing staff will always need to assess such recommendations to determine their appropriateness, a data system can help ensure that problem facilities are not overlooked and that enforcement actions are consistently utilized.

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State Examples

The **Arizona** Department of Health Services, Division of Licensing Services, completes a Regulation Compliance Evaluation for every inspection that provides a quick picture of the facility. It allows staff to quickly pull reports and statistics in a variety of areas for the department, other agencies, the public, etc.Based on the Statement of Deficiencies data, staff can determine the number of citations for each rule, whether they are repeated deficiencies, and the types of enforcement actions (fines, training, denials, revocations) taken. They are also able to tabulate data for reports or trend analyses of enforcement actions at the stroke of a key.

The **Massachusetts**Department of Early Education and Care has a dedicated data system that records the number of regulatory noncompliances relatedto child health and safety requirements. A number above the mean could result in enforcement action onbehalf of the agency, up to and including revocation of the license. The department is developing an automated risk managementinstrument that provides an objective analysis of a program'sperformance during a licensing period and protocols that targetannounced and unannounced visits to programs identified as posing a higher risk to the health andsafety of children. This will assist the department in moreeffectively enforcing new regulations and better utilizing existing staff resources.

The **Texas**Department of Family and Protective Services' automated data system includes its weighted enforcement approach, which is based on the risk posed to children. Licensing staff continue to document observations to capture the scope and severity of the deficiency, but the weighted standards are now part of the decisionmaking process, resulting in more consistent and equitable enforcement practices. An electronic Risk Analysis summary can be requested by staff seeking feedback on corrective actions. Weighted standards have also provided a more efficient way of collecting data on deficiencies and subsequent licensing actions that will help identify and address trends, disparities, and risk to children more effectively.

The **Virginia** Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs, has used DOLPHIN, a mobile-based technology system, for licensing inspections since 2003. The system features a searchable database for families and can provide the last 5 years of inspection reports; it is also used for caseload management, to ensure consistency in enforcement actions, and to assist in supporting research on the effect of licensing policies. It includes a Performance Tracking or Risk Profile Report that enables aninspector to track the performance of a licensee—including complaint investigations—based on the initial, renewal, and all subsequent inspections conducted during the licensure period selected. The Performance Tracking Report enables a supervisor and an inspector to compare the licensee with the facility's peer group on three performance indicators: (1) the average number of noncompliances; (2) the average Risk/Safety Matrix score assessed from violations of key health and safety standards; and (3) one or more negative events, such as receiving a sanction; having a valid complaint with a Risk/Safety rating of "B-2" or higher; and/or being required by the division to develop an Intensive Plan of Correction for one or more egregious noncompliances. The first two measures can be generated by the automated system, while the third measure requires an inspector to review the facility's files for negative events.

Use of Licensing and Compliance Data

There is a shortage of national research on the elements of a licensing program—e.g., frequency of visits, enforcement actions, and technical assistance—that have the greatest impact on ensuring children's safety and well-being. Licensing databases will for the first time enable State agencies to assess the impact of their decisions, both in revisions to licensing policies and in quality improvement initiatives. Supply and demand data can help target where recruitment efforts are needed. Assessing and utilizing noncompliance data by licensing specialist,

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region, and at the State level can identify trends that will guide use of resources and inform the development of QRIS criteria.

Licensing and compliance data offer a wealth of information on the status of child care providers if they are consistently recorded and retrievable. Standard10.4.3.3 of *Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-home Child Care Programs Third Edition* (American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) et al., 2011) states:

> The state regulatory agency should have access to an information system for collecting data relative to the incidence of illness and injuries, confirmed child abuse and neglect, and death of children in facilities. This data should be shared with appropriate agencies and the child care health consultant for analysis. (p. 411)

Identifying problem areas for child care providers can result in targeted technical assistance and training as well as clarification to licensing regulations.

CCDF administrators are now required to submit to the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Child Care a biannual Quality Performance Report (QPR).[3] Strong data systems will make it possible to answer the following QPR questions for each provider category:

> A.1.2.1 Number of licensed programs

> A1.2.2 What percentage of programs received monitoring visits, and at what frequency, for each provider category during the last fiscal year?

> A1.2.3 How many programs had their licenses suspended or revoked due to licensing violations as defined in your State/Territory during the last fiscal year?

> A1.2.4 How many programs were terminated from participation in CCDF subsidies due to failure to meet licensing or minimum CCDF health and safety requirements during the last fiscal year?

> A1.2.5 How many previously license-exempt providers were brought under the licensing system during the last fiscal year?

> A1.2.6 How many injuries as defined by the State/Territory occurred in child care during the last year? How many fatalities occurred in child care as of the end of the last year?

State Examples

The **Georgia** Department of Early Care and Learning assesses licensing staff for reliability in evaluating licensing rules. All licensing consultants participate in this project, which measures the consistency of licensing findings between consultants and regions. The information is used to refine licensing instruments and target specific content area for training for staff and for child care programs.In 2009, Georgia developed inter-rater visit tools to assist consultants with consistently evaluating licensing rules. Beginning in May 2010, a selected core group of 16

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[3]The QPR is an annual progress report thatcollects data on child care quality activities and quality outcomes. The full QPR is presented as Appendix 1 athttp://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/law/guidance/current/pi2011-03/state_plan_2012.pdf.

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licensing consultants made visits together, and their documented rule citations were statistically scored to determine the rate of reliability among consultants.Once the core group of child care consultants was reliable, all licensing consultants went through this process and, in July 2011, 81 percent of licensing consultants were reliable with the way they determined that licensing rules were met. A periodicity schedule for inter-rater visits is being developed so that these visits become a routine requirement for a consultant's workload each year.

The **Indiana**Family and Social Services Administration will begin to evaluatewhether enrollment and participation in the QRIS decreases the incidence of seriouslicensing noncompliances.

The **Louisiana**DSS Licensing Section is assessing the compliance outcomes of child care facilities in which technicalassistance has been provided to correct deficiencies that are serious, repeated, or numerous.

The **New York** Office of Children and Family Services usesa geographic computer-based system that can identify child care programs within a ZIP Code, within a radius of a location, county, or near properties that are known for environmental issues such as Super Fund sites, gas stations, nail salons, body shops, etc.The ability to locate clusters of child care programs in specific locations enables the Division of Child Care Services to contact specific providers in the event of a disaster or public threat.The system is also being expanded to collect demographic and program information on legally exempt providers of child care.

The **South Carolina** Office of Research and Statistics has developed Web-based analytic data cubes for Child Care Services that allow staff to analyze aggregated data, drill to the provider level, and create maps. As a result, staff have the ability to easily examine data from the licensing database through tables, graphs, and maps. In one example, staff used the cubes to track numbers and types of deficiencies and to determine areas of focus for training regarding regulatory topics. Using the data, staff then identified areas of the State with the most violations in specific regulatory categories, thereby targeting training and technical assistance efforts. Primary areas of focus include, but are not limited to, fire and life safety, nutrition, health and safety, and program administration.

Linkages With Other Systems

Coordinated early care and education data systems can provide multiple benefits to partners.In the broadest use, linked data systems can answer questions such as where children are receiving care as well as assisting policymakers with evaluating State investments and targeting resources.The Early Childhood Data Collaborative has established 10 fundamentals of coordinated State early care and education data systems (Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2011).One of the fundamentals addresses program site data on structure, quality, and work environment.As cross-sector data analysis becomes more sophisticated, the licensing agency may be asked to provide information such as ages of children served, funding sources, the availability of special services, accreditation, classroom staff-child ratios, curriculum, wages, benefits, and turnover.

Linkages with other data systems can provide ready information to licensors in preparation for a monitoring inspection or to support the issuance of a license or the investigation of a complaint.Some examples include:

- Reviewing staff qualifications and training through a professional development registry
- Accessing criminal history and child abuse registry checks
- Determining the number of children receiving a subsidyat each facility
- Checking the QRIS status and history

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■ Checking the delivery of any technical assistance to the program

An increasing number of States are including participation in a practitioner professional development registry as a minimum licensing requirement or a QRIS criterion.Personnel registries track practitioners' completed education, training, and other experience, and professional activities. A State's core knowledge and/or competency areas and its career lattice can be the foundation of a registry, tracking practitioners' attainment of training in the core areas and determining placement on a career lattice or pathway.Reviewing this information electronically before or during a monitoring visit can improve the accuracy of information and reduce the time spent going through paper files.

Several States require an electronic fingerprinting process in which scanned fingerprints of child care providers are submitted to the State public safety agency.The results are then shared with the licensing agency.Preliminary results from the *NARA 2011 Child Care Licensing Programs and Policies Survey* reflect that background check systems will notify the licensing manager in 15 states if a provider's criminal record has changed.Electronic background check records can also aid in the portability of background checks when staff move between programs, reducing the burden and cost of readministering the check if it is within the state's parameters.

The *Child Care Administrator's Improper Payments Information Technology Guide,Part I* (McDonald, 2011) notes that 37 States have automated alerts for when a provider is no longer eligible to participate in the subsidized child care program for any reason. Information linkages can help inform both licensing and the subsidy program in multiple ways:

1. To verify that the number of children receiving subsidies at a given time does not exceed the licensed capacity.

2. To discontinue subsidy reimbursement when a provider is no longer eligible, such as when a licensing enforcement action is taken against a facility.

3. To capture a QRIS level so that the appropriate tiered reimbursement rate can be paid.

As most QRISs are based on the foundation of licensing, linkages with QRIS managers are becoming increasingly important. Licensing staff may be the first to know when significant changes have occurred at a facility (e.g., new director) or when an enforcement action is being taken that could affect the QRIS rating level. Technology can support automatic alerts or a strong communication protocol to ensure that information is shared.

When licensing staff have access to information on facilities receiving technical assistance or can view program assessments such as the Environment Rating Scales, they can provide additional support and reinforce areas needing improvement during their monitoring visits. Child care resource and referral agencies and technical assistance providers can also benefit from access to the licensing database, being able to better target their services and prepare appropriate training and resources. Some systems ensure security measures in which various users only have access to data that they are authorized to view.

State Examples

The **Indiana** Family and Social Services Administration's licensing database is linked to the QRIS database so that all partners are aware of current regulatory issues and corresponding technical assistance needs. For example, when a provider enrolled in Paths to QUALITY is moved to "not in good standing" within the licensing database due to a negative enforcement action, the technical assistance partners are immediately notified through the Paths to

QUALITYdatabase. This ensures that Paths to QUALITY awards, incentives, and technical assistance are not offered to providers who are ineligible due to their loss of good standing, thus protecting limited resources and the integrity of the Paths to QUALITY level displayed for parents. Licensing consultants will soon be able to electronically request technical assistance for providers who are having issues with a specific regulation. This will allow for even closer alignment between licensing and the quality specialists and greater tracking and reporting of quality interventions and improvements.Last, the licensing database is also linked to the Automated Intake System for subsidy eligibility. This ensures that providers are eligible to receive CCDF payments prior to a parent selecting them, links the Paths to QUALITY level with CCDF children, and assists with monitoring for potential fraud issues, e.g., cross-matching CCDF parents who are also providers.

The **Louisiana** Department of Children and Family Services partnered with Branagh Information Groupto develop a process management system for QRIS field staff to verify documentation of indicators using tablet technology and compile staff qualifications and Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessments into one complete application for review by state office. This web-based system facilitates communication, efficiency and customer service.

Private funders in **Miami-Dade, Florida**, contracted with WELS (Web-based Early Learning System) to develop a data management system that includeslicensing; the professional development registry; assessment data, including the Environment Rating Scales andClassroom Assessment Scoring system; and QRIS checklists. It was created to be a single point of entry for quality initiatives and provides a consolidated rating from multiple assessment tools. WELS' aggregated data system generates program profiles and creates quality improvement plans for child care programs that can include specialized accreditation plans and plans for Head Start programs.It can also be used to track resources and help inform systemic investments.A Technical Assistance Activity Log for coaches/mentors documents planning, onsite support, and their professional development.WELS also offers online provider training and archived Webinars for providers and community partners in Miami-Dade. WELS is working on a "paperless" QRIS process with a multilingual provider portal on which programs can apply online, submit a self-study, create and update a quality improvement plan, and apply for a grant.WELS is currently working with New York and Washington to design their data systems.

The **New Jersey** Department of Children and Families conducts Criminal History Record Information background checks by a system of electronic fingerprinting known as Live-Scan.Fingerprints are scanned by computer directly from a specially programmed touch screen. The prints are then electronically transmitted to the Division of State Police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for processing.Prints are flagged, and an automatic notification of any subsequent arrests or convictionsis sent to the department.These background checks are required for child care center staff, resource family parents, staff working in treatment programs for youth, adoption agency staff, and prospective adoptive parents.

The **Wisconsin**Department of Health and Family Services includes participation in the State's professional development registry, The Registry,as a minimum licensing requirement and for participation in their QRIS. The Registry awards certificates verifying that people have met all minimum entry-level and continuing education requirements. Training beyond those requirements, along with years of experience and professional contributions, are represented by the levels and stars of The Registry's career ladder.The Registry certificate reflects child care positions for which the participant qualifies. Licensors and QRIS consultants can access a secure portal to view staff training records for licensed programs. A data interface allows for a daily transfer of licensing staff data from the State to The Registry.

Online Licensing Information for Consumers

Consumers are increasingly relying on the Internet to research purchases, and this now includes searching for child care as well. Almost all States maintain a Web site that allows consumers to search for child care providers using criteria such as the provider's name, provider type, geographic location, types of care provided, and QRIS level. Resources on evaluating and choosing child care, such as checklists or links to child care resource and referral agencies, are also commonly provided.

In the preliminary results from the *NARA 2011 Child Care Licensing Programs and Policies Survey,* 29 States reported that they post licensing information about child care facilities on their Web sites for access by parents and the general public, and 13 States reported plans to do so. However, State Websites vary in how customer-friendly, accessible, and meaningful they are to consumers.

Some States post full licensing inspection reports, while others post information or summaries about rule violations, complaints, and enforcement actions taken against facilities.[4] *Recommended Best Practices for Human Care Regulation* (NARA, 2009) advises that inspection and sanction reports remain online for a period of at least 3–4 years, preferably longer.

Providers want assurance of fairness and consistency regarding information on the Internet that may affect their business. In some States, providers are given an opportunity to first review the posting or publicly respond when complaints or deficiencies are posted. Four States reported posting all complaints, while 12 States only included complaints that had been substantiated.

While there is little research on this topic, a study in Broward County, Florida, found that the impact of posting licensing information on the Internet extended beyond parental decisionmaking. In *What Happens When Child Care Inspections and Complaints are Made Available on the Internet?,* Witte and Queralt (2004) studied the impact of placing child care inspection and complaint reports on the Internet when the information was accessible and easy to use, the media widely reported its availability, and the inspector's name and contact information were provided on the first page of the report. They found that inspectors completed significantly more reports and that findings were more likely to be mixed. They also found significant improvements in classroom environment and center management at centers serving children from low-income families with child care subsidies.

State Examples

The **Colorado** Department of Human Services posts providers' public file reviews online because they are considered public information under the State's open records information law. Every public file includes a summary sheet on each provider and the results of founded and unfounded complaint visits. The licensing program believes that complaints may reflect concerns even when not substantiated, but they do not accept anonymous complaints. Providers are asked to view their own records, and there is a process where they may have information expunged that should not be made public. Also included on the State portal page is a MapQuest function that shows the location of convicted perpetrators who live near any facility.
http://www.colorado.gov/apps/cdhs/childcare/lookup/index.jsf

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[4] Links to State licensing Web sites are provided in a report entitled *Licensing Information Posted on the Internet*, which is available upon request from NCCCQI.

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The **Ohio** Child Care Licensing Section within the Department of Job and Family Services provides information about programs, including National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation, QRIS level, capacity by age group, whether the program has an agreement to provide publicly funded child care, and whether they participate in the federal Child Care Food Program. Program inspections are categorized as fully compliant, partially compliant, and whether noncompliances were fully, partially, or not addressed. The full inspection report is available online and reflects the noncompliance findings, corrections, and compliance response due date.http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/cdc/query.asp

The **Utah** Department of Workforce Services, Office of Child Care's Website, Care about Childcare, is designed to promote quality child care for both families and child care providers. A short video featuring a Utah pediatrician and mother explains how parents can seek a provider who meets the quality indicators that are important to them. Every licensed center and licensed family/home provider has a profile page on the Website where they can upload a statement about their program philosophy, pictures of their program, and links to their Facebook page, blog, or Website. Each profile page also includes photos and information about ages accepted, operating hours, vacancies,etc. The licensing history provides inspection dates and types; the finding category (cited, repeat cited); the noncompliance level;and the rule, finding, and the date that correction was verified.Each provider profile page will also reflect which of seven quality indicators they have applied for and achieved through the Office of Child Care.http://health.utah.gov/licensing/findaprovider.htm

The **Washington** Department of Early Learning's Child Care CheckWebsite strives to provide as much information as possible to help parents make the right child care decisions for their family. In addition to basic licensing information, upgrades now include:(1) certified providers who are not required to be licensedbut wish to comply with Statelicensing rules, such as Tribesand other governments; (2) providers who are closed, and thedate and reason for closure; (3) compliance agreements as ofJuly 1, 2011, that are related tovalid licensing complaints; and (4) the background check statusfor the past 3 calendaryears. The Department of Early Learning is developing a procedurefor employeesto request to have their namessuppressed in the event they havea protection order from a court.https://apps.del.wa.gov/check/CheckSearch.aspx

Online Resources and Alerts for Providers

The *Child Care Administrator's Improper Payments Information Technology Guide,Part I* (2011) notes that

> Providers may have the ability to view and update information about their facilities, staff, and the specifics of the services they offer, such as their hours of operation, types of care they provide, and relevant staff training and professional development activities. Typically, this function is administered through a secure online portal. Providers also may be able to view information about any complaints submitted and the status of related investigations. In addition, providers sometimes are able to view and sign contracts online and submit information necessary for the contracting process.Allowing providers to enter information online about their operations is an effective means of keeping provider information up to date. (pp. 13–14)

It will become increasingly common for providers to be able to access updated resources from agency Web sites. Letters that have been mailed to providers can be posted for future reference. Some States no longer make printed copies of licensing requirements available but post them on the agency Web site where they can be updated. At least 24 States have interpretive guidelines, and those that are designed to provide clarification for providers as well as staff can also be posted on the Web site. Some States have included a "contact us" option where Web users can make a comment or post a question.

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Electronic licensing databases can facilitate communication and generate provider email addresses that can be used to share a newsletter, training opportunities, requests for feedback, or critical information before, during, and after an emergency or disaster.

State Examples

The **Indiana**Family and Social Services Administration's Web site provides recent news such as updates on a measles outbreak, Let's Move! Child Care, and new crib safety standards. Provider resources include product recalls, a video on lead poisoning, and a link to professional development opportunities. Licensing information includes clarifications to the interpretative guidelines for home and center, the meeting schedules of licensing advisory committees, and proposed changes to licensing rules.

The **Kansas** Department for Children and Familiesposted guidance documents for the early childhood community on their Web site in response to the 2009 H1N1 pandemic. Information was provided on facility closures, and regular communication with local public health officials was encouraged. The department utilized its Web site as well as social media to inform child care facilities and families about new health, safety, and supervision regulations effective February 2012. In addition, the department hosted a live Twitter chat and responded to questions about the new regulations via Face book. Child care facility licensing and compliance information, including survey findings, is available online through a Web-based portal. An online child care licensing application is under development and is tentatively scheduled for completion byearly 2013. The online application will reduce the length of time required to process an application and issue a license. The application will also feature the option for a provider to enroll with the Department for Children and Families to serve families receiving child care subsidies.

The **North Carolina** Division of Child Development and Early Education created an Emergency Preparedness Web page for providers, available on the Division of Child Development'sWeb site, which provides an extensive list of resources, including an emergency plan template and tips for providers.

The **Texas** Department of Family and Protective Services maintains a Web site to provide information to parents, consumers, providers, and anyone interested in child care issues. All licensing standards are published online, along with an extensive Frequently Asked Questions that helps to clarify standards. Providers can submit background check requests online and receive a reply within 1 or 2 days if there is no criminal history. Providers can download forms, obtain information about inclusive care, take online courses to meet their training requirements, and complete a survey after they have had an inspection.Potential child care providers can get information about starting their business, and home providers can apply for a permit online. Texas used Federal stimulus dollars to also develop a Technical Assistance Library.The library includes up to 500 one-page documents on resources and best practices related to maintaining or exceeding minimum licensing requirements.All documents are formatted to meet Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility guidelines, and some have been translated intoother languages.Utilizing tablets and portable printers, staff are able to print resources from the Technical Assistance Library onsite during an inspection, email the materials to the provider, or direct the provider to the licensing Web site.A digital librarian is managing updates to the library and monitors usage to determine which resources are most requested.

The **Washington** Department of Early Learning used their listserv to notify providers and their families of areas that were facing an increased risk of flood conditions and provided a link to tips about flood preparedness.

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Requests for Public Feedback

Several States are using newsletters, listservs, and Web sites to keep providers informed of updates to the licensing program. Such notices are used increasingly to solicit feedback to policy changes, especially revisions to licensing requirements.Standard 10.3.1.3 of *Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-home Child Care Programs, Third Edition* (AAP et al., 2011) notes that

> State licensing rules should be developed with active community participation by all interested parties including parents/guardians, service providers, advocates, professionals in medical and child development fields, funding and training sources. The regulatory development process should include many opportunities for public debate and discussion as well as the ability to provide written input. (pp. 398-399)

Many States are now collecting provider email addresses or encouraging providers to voluntarily sign up to receive notices so that they can be made aware of upcoming rule revisions.Accepting comments online encourages greater participation in the process from all sectors and can also assist the licensing agency in capturing and analyzing the feedback.

State Examples

The **Texas** Department of Family and Protective Services is required by State statute to provide notice ofproposed changes and the fiscal impact of each revision.Providers are notified by email of the opportunity to comment online, by mail, or at public hearings.For a proposed change to ratios and group size, the department solicited opinions of child care providers and parents with children in care through an online survey and presented the results at a stakeholder forum. Their Web site includes a page on "what's new in licensing."

The **Washington** Department of Early Learning initiated a "licensing reboot," asimple but structured way to hear from providers, department staff, and parents on improvements to the licensing program. Beginning in June of 2010, the department posted a short survey in English and Spanish on its Web siteonce a month for 5 months (a hard copy was also available for individuals who did not have Internet access). Topics included: communication, department/provider relationships, licensing policies and procedures, the future of child care licensing, and child care center licensing rules. The survey results, feedback from a workgroup of stakeholders, and national resource materials all helped inform the recommendations for improving child care licensing in Washington. In addition, the Department of Early Learning newsletter alerts providers of the opportunity to comment on draft and proposed licensing rules. A Web site explains the revision process and lists all comments that have been received.

Licensing Staff Development

As is the case with child care providers, turnover and geographic distribution of licensing staff can make training a challenge. States are exploring ways to use technology to deliver initial and ongoing training, communicate program changes, and support the professional development of staff.

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State Examples

The **Colorado** Department of Human Services licensing supervisory staff completed the four NARA online courses based on the NARA Curriculum through the University of Southern Maine/Muskie School of Public Serviceas a group with a NARA trainer available to lead discussions.

The **Louisiana** Department of Social Services first contracted with NARA for onsite training on the NARA Curriculum and later had all staff complete the online courses.

The **North Carolina** Division of Child Development and Early Education has responded to acommunication challenge that is common when staff are physically located across the State, opportunities for in-person meetings are limited, and legislative, rule, or policy changes can occur quickly. Bimonthly "Debinars," named for DivisionDirector Deb Cassidy, provide an opportunity for all staff to see and hear updates at the same time. Questions can be submitted during the Webinar and are answered immediately. The Webinar can include information that is agency specific—e.g., updates on travel, new policies implemented—or related to partners or activities such as prekindergarten expansion or the Early Learning Challenge. Second, staff electronic newsletters can expand upon topics shared during the Webinar and also provide links to research that is relevant to the work that the agency does. This can assist in keeping staff up-to-date on the latest trends and topics that are being discussed both within the State as well as nationally.

Conclusion

Rapid advances in technology are assisting licensing programs to operate in a more intentional, data-driven manner as well as providing valuable resources to agency staff and stakeholders, including child care providers and parents. We anticipate that advances will continue to occur quickly and lead to new strategies to better protect the safety and well-being of children in out-of-home care. Some of these outcomes will include:

- Increased focus on oversight of programs not meeting requirements
- Improved requirements that are informed by data analysis and public feedback
- More timely and consistent use of enforcement actions
- Enhanced and targeted professional development of licensing staff
- Better informed families in choosing and engaging with their child's program
- Easily accessible and current resources for providers
- Improved communication and coordination within the early childhood system.

The Office of Child Care supports States and Territories in their movement toward greater efficiencies through the use of new technologies. Each of these advances brings us closer to our goal of safer, healthier places for children.

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